

Preventing Iranian nuclear proliferation:  
A new U.S. policy towards Iran

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## **Introduction**

A cache of Iranian made explosives are found in Iraq. Iranian speed boats harass U.S. Naval ships in the Strait of Hormuz and threaten violence. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad threatens to wipe Israel "off the map."<sup>1</sup> The terrorist organizations Hezbollah and Hamas receive Iranian support. In recent years, Iran has been a thorn in the side of the United States' foreign interests. Iranian military actions and political posturing have been bold. Yet, with the prospect of gaining a nuclear weapon, Iran will certainly become bolder and eventually possess a catastrophic capability. Because global attempts to curb Iran's nuclear proliferation have failed, the U.S. must pursue a new comprehensive policy towards Iran which includes diplomacy, economic sanctions, and the use of force as a last resort.

### **Background: Who is Iran and why do they matter?**

#### Who is Iran?

Since the Islamic revolution that overthrew Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979, Iran has been governed by an Islamic Republic. This "theocracy-democracy hybrid"<sup>2</sup> is led by the

Supreme Leader, Shiite Clergyman Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran's head of state is President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Iran has a 290 member legislature (the *Majilis-e-Shuray-e Islami* or *Majilis*), a cabinet of ministers, and a judiciary. As the Economist Intelligence Unit points out, President Ahmadinejad is the outspoken face of Iran, yet the real control of power lies with the Supreme Leader and other non-elected positions.<sup>3</sup>

The U.S. will need to consider Iran's population when formulating any long-term strategy. Iran is a country of over 70.4 million people.<sup>4</sup> The population is very diverse; half are Persian and the rest are ethnic minorities. Air Force Fellows Charles Douglass and Michael Hays note in their report, "A US strategy for Iran," that Iran has a very youthful society, with two-thirds under 30 years old.<sup>5</sup> These young Iranians will play a large role in defining the future politics of Iran. The author Masoud Kazemzadeh describes Iranian youth as highly educated and resentful of the theocracy at the top of their government. In a 2003 internet poll at the prestigious Amir Kabir University in Iran, 85 percent of the students polled said they supported the establishment of a secular and democratic republic.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Iran is a nation dominated by Islamic leaders and inhabited by an indignant, youthful society.

## Why Iran matters

Iran is strategically important to the U.S. for several reasons, the first of which is their military capability. With 545,000 people in military service, Iran has the largest army in the Middle East. However, in a 2007 article, Gawdat Bahgat notes that "Iran has not been allowed to buy Western weapon systems since the 1979 Islamic Revolution."<sup>7</sup> To compensate for a lack of current military technology, Iran has worked diligently on upgrading its missile systems. For example, the Iranians possess the "Shehab-3 (Shooting Star), with a range of 1,300 miles."<sup>8</sup> When considering the potential range of the Shehab-3, several locations of U.S. interest are threatened by the missile's capability. As recorded on an online distance chart, the "Shooting Star" can easily range Tel Aviv, Baghdad, and Kabul from Tehran.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, Iran's position on the map raises economic concerns. An independent task force sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) cites the global economic importance of Iran's position near "Saudi Arabia and the passageways through which 40% of the world's oil must flow."<sup>10</sup> Should Iran block the flow of oil out of the Strait of Hormuz, global energy prices would skyrocket, causing wide-ranging repercussions like the ones seen during the oil crisis of summer of 2008. In addition,

the CFR task force reports that Iran has "approximately 11 percent of the world's oil reserves and the second-largest deposits of natural gas - [making Iran] an indispensable player in the world economy."<sup>11</sup> With so much of the World's fossil fuels, Iran has the potential to hold hostage the global economy.

Lastly, Iran matters because it is located between the newly created republics of Iraq and Afghanistan and nearly 200,000 US troops stationed there. Currently, Iran has the ability and the will to destabilize the governments of both countries. More importantly, Iran has the ability to harm American lives working tirelessly to spread freedom. We must not allow Iran to undermine either government's sovereignty nor harm one American life.

#### **U.S. Policy: Limited success, overall failure**

For years, the U.S. has worked with other countries and the UN to persuade Iran to stop enriching uranium, the process to "weaponize" nuclear fuel. Despite attempts to dissuade Iran's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, Iranians continue to move closer to nuclear capability. Yet, two aspects of the current policy are working: U.S. isolation of Iran's economy and multilateral sanctions.

### U.S. isolation

U.S. policy towards Iran has attempted to isolate Iran's banks and businesses from foreign investors to bankrupt their government. If the U.S. can deteriorate the Iranian economy enough, they will yield to U.S. pressure and comply with standing nuclear non-proliferation treaties. The most recent U.S. attempt to weaken Iran's economic situation is the September 2006 Iran Freedom Support Act (IFSA). According to Douglass and Hays, the IFSA "seeks to strengthen the [fiscal] sanctions" against Iran and contains "new provisions for action by the United States against companies supporting Iran's WMD program," domestically and internationally.<sup>12</sup> This update to policy will exacerbate Iran's weakening economic condition.

### Multilateral sanctions

In an effort to garner multilateral support, the United States has worked with the United Nations to impose three United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. Since 2002, the UN has passed resolutions 1737, 1747, and, in March, 2008, more restrictions that "[ban] trade with Iran in goods that have both civilian and military uses."<sup>13</sup> These resolutions show growing international cooperation and concern over Iran's nuclear

aspirations. Yet, these multilateral sanctions have not been enough to curtail Iran's nuclear proliferation.

### The failure of policy

Economic sanctions from the U.S. and international coalition have failed to dissuade Iran from creating a nuclear weapon. As recently as March, 2008, a CBS/AP online article notes that during ratification of the most recent UN sanctions, the U.S. and others have proof of Iran's nuclear ambitions. The article states that America and "their European allies stressed that the report from the U.N. nuclear watchdog confirmed that Iran has continued to enrich uranium, in defiance of Security Council resolutions, and demanded that Tehran suspend its uranium centrifuge program."<sup>14</sup> In Douglass' and Hays' report, they assert that "Iran has a goal of producing a nuclear weapon but will not produce one for at least five years."<sup>15</sup> This estimate provides for an Iranian nuclear weapon by 2013. Since sanctions have failed to cease Iran's uranium enrichment, the U.S. must create a new policy before it's too late.



## **The new policy**

To ensure Iran stops enriching uranium, the U.S. must establish direct diplomatic relations, intensify economic sanctions, and threaten the use of a military strike as a last resort.

### Direct Diplomacy

Diplomacy with Iran must be public, unilateral and multilateral. Talks with this regime must outline specific obligations for Iran to fulfill in order to achieve concessions from the United States and the international community. Foremost of these obligations must be an end to all nuclear proliferation. As outlined in previous UNSC resolutions, Iran must provide full disclosure and allow unconditional inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Here, the incentive for Iran is nuclear power for peaceful purposes under strict scrutiny.

Iran must also stop their support to terrorist groups undermining Iraqi democracy and Israeli sovereignty, specifically, Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Such Iranian actions would be rewarded with the removal of the

Persian state from former President George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" label; warranting some reduction in economic sanctions.

### Economic sanctions

Current economic sanctions have destabilized the Iranian economy but have failed to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions. Douglass and Hays believe that "economically, the easiest way to affect Iran is through the oil barrel."<sup>16</sup> The U.S. must boldly lead efforts to quickly bring Iran to the negotiating table. The only sure way to do this is a complete, world-wide ban on Iranian oil exports. Historically, the U.S. has worked with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to "depress the price of oil" and limit Iran's regional influence.<sup>17</sup> The GCC and its premier member, Saudi Arabia, is a vital cog in diplomacy with Iran. This oil embargo against Iran can be accomplished with public assurances from the GCC and the Organizations of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to stabilize oil prices. Only sanctions of this caliber will bring about the conclusion of Iran's nuclear proliferation.

In a middle east dominated by Sunni Arab nations (among them Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya and Kuwait) the idea of an Iranian nuclear superpower is very undesirable. Previously, the thought of an oil blockade generated fears of astronomical

energy prices that would cripple the World, and more specifically, the American economy. These fears can be extinguished with the public support of OPEC. A credible threat to Iran's national wealth and economic stability would force the Ayatollah to comply or face a crippling reduction in personal power. The Iranian regime's dependence on oil revenue is a weakness that must be exploited, Douglass and Hays agree:

Since oil revenues buttress the regime, threats by Iran to use the "oil weapon" against outsiders are hollow. In fact and very importantly...the regime's dependence on a fundamentally weak industry represents a key strategic vulnerability.<sup>18</sup>

The Iranian regime would rather capitulate to international demands than lose their power.

### The last resort

Neither diplomacy nor sanctions will work if there is no credible threat of military force. An outright U.S. invasion and regime change (as in Iraq, circa 2003) is not a viable option. Therefore, military force should be restricted to the destruction of nuclear facilities that have shown the potential for weapons-grade uranium production. These surgical strikes must convey the message that the international community will not stand for a nuclear-capable Iran, but supports the prosperity of the Iranian people. These attacks, used only as a

last resort, would be specific in purpose and must make every possible attempt to limit collateral damage.

### **Counterargument**

#### Rapprochement

Webster's defines rapprochement as the "establishment or renewal of harmonious relations."<sup>19</sup> Masoud Kazemzadeh describes rapprochement's underlying principle as the belief the Iranian "regime can be convinced to play by the norms of international conduct by a combination of carrots and sticks." Rapprochement supporters would allow Iran to possess a nuclear weapon with the hope to contain its use or sale. Mr. Kazemzadeh disagrees with this principle and discusses its flawed "assumption that the rationality that worked with Communists (which formed the foundation for containment, deterrence, and mutual assured destruction [MAD]) will also work with Islamic fundamentalists. [The proponents for rapprochement] dismiss the fundamentalist ideological principles of mass martyrdom...and rapture as determinants of the foreign policy of the fundamentalist regime."<sup>20</sup> Thus, once nuclear capability is obtained, neither a renewal of international relations nor the threat of mutually

assured destruction will deter Iran from employing its nuclear arsenal.

The fundamentalist Iranian regime has the propensity to sell a nuclear weapon to any radical Islamic terrorist organization that desires to bring about the destruction of America. This will be impossible to contain. Therefore, rapprochement is not a viable policy option towards Iran.

### **Conclusion**

Iran's nuclear proliferation must be prevented, even if it means a military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities. Direct diplomacy with Iran, along with stronger economic sanctions by the international community, will bring Iran to the bargaining table. Importantly, oil is Iran's greatest source of economic security and consequently, its greatest vulnerability. Thus, economic sanctions must include a ban on Iran's oil exports. A nuclear capable Iran in an already unstable Middle East must be prevented. The United States must immediately develop a bold policy to end Iran's uranium enrichment in order to further stabilize the Middle East and prevent Iranian regional hegemony.

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<sup>1</sup> Nazila Fathi, "Wipe Israel 'off the map' Iranian says," International Herald Tribune, 27 October 2005,

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URL: <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/10/26/news/iran.php>>, accessed 19 February 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Charles A. Douglass and Michael D. Hays, "A US Strategy for Iran," *The Walker Papers*, April 2008, accessed via ProQuest, 14 October 2008

<sup>3</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Iran, February 2007* (London: The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2007), 4.

<sup>4</sup> "Executive Summary, Iran *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - The Gulf States* (06 October 2008), URL: <[www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com)>, accessed 10 December 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Douglass and Hays, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Masoud Kazemzadeh, "The Perils and Costs of a Grand Bargain with the Islamic Republic of Iran," *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 29, (2007): 301. Cited hereafter as Kazemzadeh.

<sup>7</sup> Gawdat Bahgat, "Iran and the United States: The Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East," *Parameters: US Army War College Quarterly*, 37, no. 2, (2007): 5.

<sup>8</sup> Bahgat, 8.

<sup>9</sup> "Current Times and Distances from Tehran," Time and Date AS 1995-2008, URL: <<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/distances.html?n=246>>, accessed 13 December 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), *Iran: Time for a New Approach: Report of an Independent Task Force*, (New York, NY: CFR, July 2004), 11. Cited hereafter as CFR, *New Approach*.

<sup>11</sup> CFR, *New Approach*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Douglass and Hays, 61.

<sup>13</sup> CBS/AP, *U.N. Approves New, Tougher Iran Sanctions*, (United Nations, March 3, 2008), URL:

<<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/03/03/world/main3901077.shtml>>, December 17, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> CBS/AP, *U.N. Approves New, Tougher Iran Sanctions*.

<sup>15</sup> Douglass and Hays, 70.

<sup>16</sup> Douglass and Hays, 63.

<sup>17</sup> Douglass and Hays, 63.

<sup>18</sup> Douglass and Hays, 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Webster's Universal College Dictionary*, 1997 under the term "rapprochement."

<sup>20</sup> Kazemzadeh, 313.

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